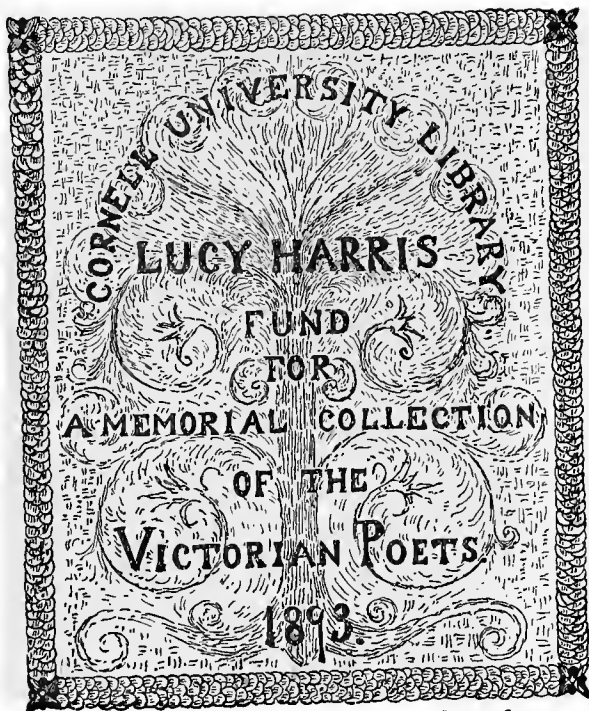


MALLOW & ASPHODEL

R. C. IRVINGLYAN

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Mallow and Asphodel



Mallow and Asphodel

By R. C. Trevelyan

“Νήπιοι, οὐδὲ ἴσασι ὅσῳ πλέον ἤμισυ παντός,
οὐδ’ ὅσον ἐν μαλάχῃ τε καὶ ἀσφοδέλῳ μέγ’ ὄνειαρ.”

London

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CONTENTS

	PAGE
EPIMETHEUS	I
ARCHILOCHUS	25
ORPHEUS	32
THE PLAYMATES	37
JUNO'S PEACOCK	39
FOR A FAN	50
QUERN SONGS	52

EPIMETHEUS

I

WHEN the Titan wars were over, and those upstart mutineers,
Friended by Prometheus' guile, had hurled the sky's coeval
peers
Down to grim Tartarean bondage, last of all that vanquished
band,
Haled before the seat of Zeus for judgment, fettered foot and
hand,
Came the minstrel Epimetheus, foolish wizard, after-wise,
With amaze and wonder staring in his simple innocent eyes.
They had found him sitting lonely by the far Atlantic shore,
Floating songs of careless rapture o'er the sea's white-spuming
floor ;
There they found the silly singer, whither he had slunk by
night,
Stolen from the fray—ah, wherefore should the sweet-voiced
minstrel fight ?
Thus they brought him, bound and wildered, lapsing ever
and anon
Back into his foolish singing, while the Thunderer's limping
son,

B

Swart Hephæstus, called a sentence from the terrible lips of
Zeus :

“Father, o’er this shiftless truant let a doom be shaken loose.
Yet deal gently with him, Father, guilty found in other kind
Than those lords of insurrection. Nought he knew what
moved their mind ;

Scant his care if thou or Cronus reigned : he followed, as
behoved,

Whither his brother giants bade him, chanting the sweet
lays they loved.

How should deep forecasting treason ambush in those child-
like eyes ?

Of the future nought he sees, in bygone knowledge only
wise.

In the past his wits go ever rambling like a little child
Hither thither seeking berries down the brambly wood-ways
wild.

Yet since he must surely suffer joined in penance with his
kin,

Then devise some milder bondage, portioned to his venial sin.
Do not bid us clamp his body on some everlasting bed
Hot with unimagined torment, lest, when thither he is led,
From our grasp he sing our mallets with entreaty musical,
And our hands heaved up for pity let the links and fetters
fall.”

Thus the kind Hephæstus pleaded, while within the brain
of Jove

To and fro the thoughts like shuttles plying swift a judg-
ment wove,

Warp of wisdom, woof of justice, worthy of a king so wise.
But the giant with a question in his wildered wandering eyes
Gazed around, then rent the silence with a loud and bitter cry :

"Whither have they fallen—my brothers—fallen through the boundless sky ?

As I sat beside the ocean, I beheld them one by one
Tumbling through the purple evening, right across the setting sun :

Far away they fell to Westward, and I knew not what was done ;

But the sea grew rough with horror, and the mountains quaked with dread,

And the sky grew dark, and reboant thunder laboured overhead ;

And I hid my face and cowering long I sat in doubt and fear,
Till these strange ones came upon me, bound my hands and drew me here.

But I seek my pleasant brethren ; where they sojourn I would learn.

Have ye seen this mighty kindred ? Easy are they to discern :
Tall and lovely are their bodies, beautiful their voice and strong,

When they call to one another, as the wind-chafed forest's song,

Or the parle of lions calling o'er the hills from lair to lair.

Tell me, ye strange mocking faces, have ye seen them anywhere ? "

Thus he wailed and looked around him, while the Olympian corridors

Echoed with immortal laughter, as on sea-indented shores
When with washing lapping laughter softly laughs a prisoned wave

To the answering roof above it of some deep-receding cave.
Nay, e'en Zeus himself grew jocund, and his heart with mirth was warm :

From the lips that judge the world burst laughter like a
thunder-storm,
And the palm that darts the lightning smote the great eternal
thigh ;
With the shock the walls rang loudly, and within where
peacefully
Hidden in the secret cloisters of that many-chambered limb,
Slept the infant Dionysus, safe from Hera's wicked whim,
All the twenty silver nurses, seated on their golden stools
Round the babe to watch and tend him, fashioned with the
fire-god's tools,
Shook their glittering limbs for terror when the long walls
heaved and quaked,
And the mighty Semelean infant, from his slumber waked,
Turned about within his cradle, and addressed them ques-
tioning :
"Wherefore thus, my silver nurses, doth our house about
us ring ?
Wherefore rock the walls and tremble? Doth a brood of
fancies vain
Like a shoal of ocean fishes dartle through my father's brain,
That he wags his legs for pleasure? Hath his roving
amorous eye
Found again some maid of beauty from its vantage in the
sky ?
Can it be his wits grow nimble with the kindling touch of
wine ?
Innocent as yet and sober hangs the grape upon the vine,
Even as I within this cradle lying : but the day shall be
When I must arise to quicken all its sleeping potency,
And the universe shall drink, and to my godhead bow the
knee."

Thus he spake, nor stayed an answer, but turned round, and
to his dreams

Passed once more, and lapt in sleep resumed his world-
consoling schemes.

But the pregnant brows of Zeus grew dark with magisterial
gloom,

And his lips now stern and cruel thus pronounced a righteous
doom :

“Epimetheus, would'st thou question where thy pleasant
brethren be ?

They have parted on a journey—Wisdom's face they fain
would see.

Not in all their mighty legions holy Wisdom might be
found :

To the realms of fire to seek her they must travel under-
ground.

I beheld their fond migration setting forth, but much I doubt,
Though they seek a thousand ages, whether they will seek
her out.

In my tender care and prudence I have bound thee foot and
hand,

Lest fraternal love should bid thee track the steps of that
lost band.

How should one of heart so peaceful, tempered simple as a
child,

Bear the subterranean horror of that venture stern and wild?

Therefore shall Hephæstus take thee deep within the North-
land vast,

Far beyond its forest girdle, there to bind thy body fast

All along a craggy mountain, stretched supine as on a rack :

Thou and thy tremendous warden, starkly fettered back
to back,

Linkt with glacier chains together for a season, soon shall
be
Loving friends and sweet companions ; nay, so close your
amity,
That your beings shall commingle, and thy bones shall suffer
change,
Mystic mountain transformation, gradual petrification strange:
Into soil thy flesh shall crumble, on thy head tall pines shall
nod
All their feathery tops together when they hear the North-
wind's rod :
O'er thine eyes shall spring the oak-tree ; from beneath its
brow shall steal
Two bright streams of tears for token that thou still canst
know and feel :
Down thy cheek the larch shall muster, round thy chin the
birch shall grow,
Lifting up its trembling foliage o'er the willow-wood below.
By the voice of cataracts falling, cuckoos calling through
the air,
And the feet of brown bears shambling, reindeer rambling
here and there,
Many a time shall pleasant sleep be chased from off thy
wearied eyes,
As the slumbers of an infant teased away by summer flies.
Yet, for so would I chastise thee as a father might his child,
That by some sweet consolation thy keen pains may be
beguiled,
I will bid that singing Spirit harbour still within thy breast,
Filling all thy soul with music, as a dove that builds its
nest
High within a lofty tower fills a captive with delight.

Yea, thou shalt forget thy pain, the parching noon and chilly
night,

When thy songs creep back to nestle murmuring by thy
worn heart's side,

And melodiously ascending softly through thy throat they
glide

One by one between thy lips, as in succession glide the bees
Through their city gates to morning business over heather
leas.

And the wandering winds of heaven that have shuddered in
their flight

O'er the mouths of red volcanoes shooting far into the night
Tongues of flame, and with pollution of hot hail and
sulphurous breath

Staining all their liquid air-streams, each pure cloud and
vapour wreath,

When they pass the singing mountain, visiting its wondrous
mouth,

As with snowy feet they hasten on their journey toward the
South,

Long shall linger round to listen, charmed through all their
eddies cold,

All their fierce tempestuous whirlwinds, loading every frozen
fold

Of their gusty robes with music, ere they go their boisterous
ways

Scattering over land and ocean storm-blown snatches of thy
lays.

Shackled thus through countless ages, thou shalt gather in
by night

Wisdom from the freezing moonbeams and instruction from
the light

Of the stars in silver session ; and when dawn with rosy hand
Draws away their robes of darkness from the wakened sea
and land,
Helios shall teach thee prudence, into thine unsheltered eyes
Laughing with fierce fiery glances, till thy withered heart
grow wise,
And thy kindred be forgotten : then once more thy voice
may fling
Rapture through the ancient halls, till all their cloisters
sweetly ring,
And the Olympian peers grow hushed and stay their jocund
revelling.”
Thus the king dealt forth his righteous judgments o’er that
innocent head :
Heavy hands were laid upon him ; from that presence was
he led
Far away to watch for ages fettered on his icy bed.

II

APOLLO, DISGUISED AS AN INFANT, INSTRUCTS DÆDALUS
HOW EPIMETHEUS MAY BE FOUND

On Calymne’s rocky sea-board Dædalus had lighted down,
Flying o’er the wrinkled ocean from the towers of Minos
town.
Weary-winged and sick with anguish on a stone he sat and
wept,
While the waves with jocund laughter round about him
washed and leapt.

But he heeded not their mocking ; still he heard that bitter knell—

“Father, father ! see, I perish ! Reach thy hand ! Ah, fare thee well !”

Saw again the glittering pinions flutter idle overhead,
Saw the boy’s hands stretched toward him, saw his face as
down he sped,

Till he plunged within the cloudrack o’er the misty ocean spread.

When he raised his eyes, beside him lo ! a fisher’s cabin stood,

Built of stones and wattled reeds : its gaping holes were stopped with mud.

At the door a crone was sitting, mending nets upon the sand ;
On the floor a babe was playing, moulding shapes with infant hand—

Deftly like a master workman kneading out of pliant clay
Mimic forms of God and Goddess ranged in reverent array
Round him in a circle, mocking those brave sessions when
the Gods

Parley round the throne of Zeus in large Olympian periods.
Then the hero stepping lightly to that withered woman’s side
Spake a word in heavy trouble : “Ancient mother, worn
and tried

By the spite of years and sorrows, give me now an answer true.

I have travelled hither winging on a journey strange and new
Through the windy streets of heaven, fleeing from the
grievous wrath

Of the cruel tyrant Minos ; not alone I started forth :
Close behind my son was speeding. As two ducks rise
through the air

With their long necks stretching forward toward another
reedy lair ;

Startled by a fowler's footsteps from their pools upon the
moor,

So we voyaged on together ; but alone I reached the shore.
Down he dived beneath the vapours—Icarus ! My son,
my son !

Couldst thou not have heard my warning ? All my life
with thee is gone :

Thine was all the gathered wisdom of my art, which I had
thought

Thou shouldst lead to large perfection, by Apollo's precept
taught.

All my house with thee is perished, all my toils and hopes
are nought.

Through the mists I dropped to seek him, hovered o'er the
water's face

To and fro with vain endeavour, wandering round from
place to place ;

Saw no sight but dolphins gambolling, fishes leaping from
the waves,

Heard no sound but sea-gulls crying, cormorants screeching
from their caves ;

Sought one hour, and then a second ; could not find him
anywhere ;

But the third I journeyed landward, weeping, laden with
despair.

Mother, say, as thou wast sitting at thy task beside the shore
Hast thou seen a sudden splendour flashing down on ocean's
floor,

As the lightning falls from heaven ? Didst thou mark a
swimmer bold

Striving shoreward through the waves, or did their restless
arms enfold

Nought but some poor lifeless body hither thither tossed
and rolled ? ”

Thus the ancient dame made answer : “ What is this that
thou dost ask ?

I must stoop my weary eyes for ever o’er my homely task ;
I have no time to send them wandering on the waves or
through the skies ;

I have no care if men like lightning fall from heaven, or
heroes rise

From the waves like Aphrodite : yet sometimes I see them
come,

But their limbs are stiff with swimming, and their swollen
lips are dumb :

To the land they never win, but ’neath the breakers find a
tomb.

Stranger, wouldst thou gather counsel from a wrinkled
woman’s lips ?

Suffer not thy hero heart to scorn the timbered might of
ships.

Doth adventure bid thee cross the perilous seas from shore
to shore,

Tempt not strange forbidden paths, nor strive against our
nature’s law.

Leave the wet waves for the fishes, to the lion leave his lair,
For the immortal Gods Olympus, for the birds the bound-
less air.

Nor shalt thou disdain thy mother Earth, who gave thee life
and health ;

She can yield thee bread in plenty, fruit and wine and
golden wealth,

Women fair as Aphrodite ; and when thou weariest of all
these,

On her loamy breast thy tired limbs shall find their endless
ease."

When the hero heard this answer, silent turned he from the
door,

But the infant stayed him, speaking from his play upon the
floor :

"In the dim Cimmerian highlands, where man's feet may
never come,

Where the boisterous congregations of the winds are never
dumb ;

By sheer mountain cliffs in frozen isolation girdled round,
Lies the wizard Epimetheus fast in silver fetters bound.

Till his stubborn heart grow loyal, and his brethren be
forgot,

Never shall they from his limbs unwind their crawling icy
knot.

On his ancient head is springing many a tall snow-loaded
pine,

Nodding all their tops together when they hear the tempest
whine ;

O'er his eyes the oak-trees darken, down his cheek the
larches grow ;

Round his chin the birches quiver o'er the willow-wood
below.

O'er his face great bears go ambling, deer go rambling here
and there,

All around are cuckoos calling, cataracts brawling through
the air.

Wouldst thou know the doubtful sequel of thy son's aerial
wrack ?

Spread thy wings upon the South-wind, leap upon its gusty
back,
Ride across the broad Ægean, by that easy pilot led,
Leave behind the racing billows gambolling over Helle
dead,
Travel o'er the cruel Euxine, on thy left hand skirt its
shore,
Till thou see a mighty river spreading out a golden floor
Far inland towards the sunset. Here thy wings shall change
their flight ;
They must strain and labour onward to the West, till
welcome night
Bids them sink to earth for shelter in some warm thick-
foliated nest,
As the tired dove at evening seeks her lofty wind-rocked
rest.
Three slow days the gliding highway of the stream shall be
thy guide ;
But the fourth noon, looking downward, wandering on the
riverside
Thou shalt see a giant elk, and antlered lord of many leas
Straying on in quiet pasture of the grass beneath the trees.
Stoop from heaven like an eagle ; alight astride upon his
back,
Quickly draw thy sword and thrust it through his velvet-
coated neck ;
On the green grass spill his life, then build of stones an
altar there ;
Lay upon the wood thy victim ; to the Delian breathe a
prayer
That his gracious power may lead thee to the wizard's
mountain lair.

From the flame shall rise a murmur, from the altar leap a
song,
With the smoke and sparks above thee tiny wings shall flash
and throng,
Mounting fast in countless hundreds, swarming up between
the trees,
And those leafy vaults shall echo with the floating hum of
bees.
Do not stand in foolish wonder gaping ; lift thy wings in
flight ;
Thou must follow where they lead thee : never let them
from thy sight.
All day long with steady pinions press behind their humming
host.
Nor when Night shall dusk the paths of heaven shall their
track be lost ;
But their wings' melodious rumour sweetly shall instruct
thine ear,
Lapsing on with myriad silver glances through the moon-
light clear.
On a sudden notes of distant music from a mouth unseen
Shall come fainting down the valleys, o'er the mountain
pastures green,
Like the sound of lowing cattle borne from land upon the
breeze
To poor sailors drifting lost and wildered over misty seas.
Thou shalt know the wizard's singing, thou shalt thrill to
hear the voice
That has soothed the Titans' fury and made their lordly
hearts rejoice.
Stir thy lagging wings, leap forward for thy fallen son's dear
sake ;

Leave behind the patient bees to labour onward in thy wake.
Tall and taller rise the mountains, loud and louder swells
the song,

Till beneath thee lo ! the giant, paying for an ancient wrong
Grievous penance, on a ridge of craggy rocks stretched out
along.

Lighting on his wrinkled visage, fold thy tired wings to rest,
That with faithful flight have borne thee to the haven of
thy quest.

In his mind's memorial chambers all the secret past lies
stored ;

Yet his jealous sullen humour loves not to lay bare his hoard.
Therefore, wouldst thou win thine answer, weave thy words
with threads of guile ;

Wise and crafty be thy dealings ; baffle wile with subtler
wile :

For the myriad years have taught him prudence with their
crawling pangs ;

Glaciers have devoured his simple child-like heart with
freezing fangs ;

Thirsty Helios with scorching lips has drunk his innocence ;
And though still the singing Spirit sweetly haunts within
his sense,

'Twixt his songs he mutters curses on Jove's stern omni-
potence.

Thus his soul has grown malignant, ever on evil food it feeds,
Lapt in magic meditation, wicked dreams of wizard deeds."

So the infant gave his counsel ; then to mould his beau-
teous toys

Turned again, and wreathed in smiles resumed his inter-
rupted joys.

In a muse the hero muttered, " How may holy wisdom thrive

On the lips of new-born infants? How can baby hands
contrive
Graceful forms of God and Goddess, fair beyond the art of
man?
Sure in the ambush of those limbs there lurks some power
Olympian."
When he raised his eyes again the babe had vanished from
the floor
With his works, and thus the wrinkled wife addressed him
from the door:
"Wherefore thus with eyes agaze on empty nothing dost
thou stand?
What is that thy pale lips mutter? Wouldst thou count
the countless sand?
Would thy reckless heart discover what fresh folly may be
done?
Pluck the planets from their courses, steal his shining from
the sun,
Through the chambers of the heavens on thy mad wings
float and run,
To sweep the bright clouds from its corners: easy are such
light feats for thee:
But thy treasure dropped and drowned in ocean shalt thou
never see."
Like the sound of twittering sparrows died her words within
his mind.
Still he mused, and ever musing, turned him round, and on
the wind
Spread his wings; then fast away, away it bore his headlong
flight
Northward o'er the seas, and snatched him from that
wondering woman's sight.

III

A SONG OF EPIMETHEUS

YET once more ye winds, swift wandering shepherds of the
 vaporous skies,
 Ye bright flocks of clouds, ye mountains crowned in shining
 helms of ice,
 Monarchs of the earth, give hearing, while again I lift my
 voice,
 That hath oft beguiled and soothed you with the enchant-
 ment of strange joys,
 Caught you by your misty purple fleeces, stayed your gusty
 feet,
 Pierced the sunless caves of granite where your hot hearts
 pant and beat.
 Often have ye heard me flinging joyance on the morning air,
 Golden tales of magic cadence 'neath the stars, though keen
 despair
 Gnawed within ; but now no more thus sweetly may I find
 relief ;
 I have nought to sing but bitter dirges, wailing winged with
 grief ;
 For my soul is sick and faint as some great city by the seas,
 Mother of a thousand ships, grown rich on old adulteries
 With far merchant isles and kingdoms, when her foemen
 gather round,
 Bind a mole across her harbours, raise against her gates a
 mound :
 In her streets where once the jovial chapman gossiped in his
 stall

And 'neath the tread of merry-makers e'en the stones grew
musical,

Lie the lean and wasted dead—and who shall give them
burial?

In the wealthy merchant's garden, 'twixt the lily and the
rose,

Down the paths for twilight lovers green, secure the thistle
blows;

None shall come to root it up, save haply when the hasty
spade

Breaks the turf, and ever there again some muffled face is
laid.

And her mighty men in silence slink like foxes to the walls,
And her princes sit forlorn and tremble in their feasting-
halls.

Thus my heart is faint and famished: hope at last hath
flown away,

Hope that ever nestled near it, murmuring of the happy
day

When with glad victorious faces, bright with battle in the
skies,

They should come, my Titan kindred, haling in triumphant
wise

Him the foul usurping tyrant, forced to bend on servile
knee,

To unbind my crystal chains with backward spells and set
me free.

Lift thy voice in lamentation! Weep aloud, O mother
Earth!

Broken are they, snared and taken, fallen from their pride
and mirth,

Thy delight, thy glorious Titans, children of an elder birth.

Tall and comely were their bodies, and their hands were
swift and strong ;

Yet our Empire is no more, our ancient glory hath suffered
wrong :

Yet they came, the foul usurpers, lords of craft and mis-
creant wile,

And our rightful strength lay vanquished, trodden 'neath
the feet of guile

One by one the tyrants bound them, as a labourer binds a
sheaf :

(Lift thy voice in lamentation, shake thy hills with grief :)

Yea they bore them down and thrust them deep within thy
sunless caves.

Far above their tombs yet plays the flashing frolic of thy
waves ;

Far above the Spring thy lover with voluptuous winds and
showers

Dallies with thy mighty shoulders robed in nuptial leaves
and flowers.

Many children, bright and lovely, thou shalt bear him as of
yore,

But thy first and dearest offspring shall behold thy joy no
more.

(Let thy waves foam out their grief upon the desolate
shore.)

Where is Crius ? Where is Themis ? Rhea, queen of
golden hair ?

(Joy and hope are taken from thee ; publish thy despair :)

Where is old imperial Cronos ? gentle Thea, where, oh
where ?

Under what tremendous mountain, in what mine of
Tartarus

Dost thou fret thy writhing anguish, O my sire Iapetus ?
 O'er what seas of flame and horror ruleth old Oceanus ?
 Never shall I hear your laughter, never watch your kingly
 style
 As ye gather clamouring homeward, streaming up in joyous
 file
 Through the illustrious gates of heaven from your journeys
 to and fro
 'Mid the tribes of happy mortals on the populous earth below.
 Yet though hope be dead for ever, though my lot be
 desolate,
 Though afflicted and abased I moan beneath the oppressor's
 hate,
 I will not bate my proud resolve, nor shall my just defiance
 cease,
 Nor with cringing humiliation will I sue a traitor's peace—
 Never, O my woeful brethren, shall my mighty love be cold,
 Till dark Chaos shall resume its anarch empire as of old,
 Till the victor with the vanquished to one common wrack
 are hurled,
 And remorseless Time strews forth the scattered ashes of
 the world.

IV

DÆDALUS QUESTIONS EPIMETHEUS

EPIMETHEUS ! Epimetheus ! waken, and unseal thine ear !
 Keeper of the keys of knowledge, mighty wizard, hear, oh
 hear !
 I am Dædalus, the craftsman ; regal is the birth I claim

From the house of proud Erechtheus, but a deed of blood
and shame

Brought me wage of woeful exile : with my son I found
retreat

In the land of ninety cities, in the ancient isle of Crete.

There with Minos long we harboured : there our pleasant
days we sold,

All the cunning of our hands for foolish wealth of princely
gold,

Till our very bread was bitter, and the smoke curled hate-
fully

From the roofs of Cnosos' city, mounting up the alien sky.
And with tears of tribulation oft our labouring hands were
wet,

For our souls remembered Athens and its noble people yet.

In my thought a counsel gathered, round my heart a hope
grew strong,

Well in secret I reflected, pondered and considered long.

Then I took our golden wages, in my pots I cast them
swift,

And I fashioned golden armour from the tyrant's molten gift.

For my son and me I wrought it, toiling through the silent
night,

And I set around its borders scrolls of curious delight ;

In the midst fair chased adornment, figured wealth of old-
world tales,

Mystic legends borne from wanton Egypt on rich Tyrian
sails.

In a chest I stowed it close, then turned me to my task
anew.

I devised a feathered witchcraft, wondrous wings of divers
hue,

Like the lustrous vans of Iris glistering through a summer
shower,
Stronger than the wings of Harpies, pinions of mysterious
power,
That should bear us over land and ocean with swift, easy toil,
Homeward to the rock of Athens, sheathèd in our golden
spoil.
Now we donned our arms, and now with magic seal of
yellow wax
From the sacred hives of Ceres bound the wings upon our
backs.
Closely cloaked like midnight thieves we stole in silence
from the town.
When the morning broke we stood from dizzy headland
gazing down
Over unawakened ocean muffled in its vaporous gown.
From the cliff we leapt exultant, launched upon our perilous
flight,
Floating o'er the cloudy purple billows down the streaming
light.
Long we journeyed bold and jocund, chaunting ever and
anon
Pæans to the glorious Loxion, throned within the mounting
sun.
Now we soon without mischance had crossed the surging sea
of mist,
And the very stones of Athens soon our joyful lips had
kissed :
But the boy waxed vain and wanton ; now he gambolled
overhead,
Now he shot before me far, then checked his race and
boasting said :

"Father, why with course so lowly skim we through this
nether air ?
Look, look up ! behold Apollo throned in radiant godhead
there !
Surely we are more than mortal ! O my father, let us
rise
Through his vast empyreal realm to parley with him in the
skies.
Though all golden be his garments flashing with the glance
of fire,
Yet we too in shining gold are glorious, and our souls aspire
Whirled aloft to things divine on furious chariots of desire."
Breathing forth mad-mouthed presumption upward through
the sky he leapt,
Heeding not my cries of warning. Yet a little while he
kept
Far above his ardent progress, glittering like a mimic sun,
Till in fiery wrath down looked the god on that vain-
glorious one
And beneath his glance the softening wax dissolved its
magic bands.
With a wail he tumbled past me, stretching forth poor
helpless hands,
Vanishing within the shroud that o'er the misty sea expands.
Through the clouds I dropped to seek him, hovered o'er
the water's face
To and fro with vain endeavour, wandering round from
place to place ;
Saw no sight but dolphins gambolling, fishes leaping from
the waves,
Heard no sound but sea-gulls crying, cormorants screeching
from their caves ;

Sought one hour, and yet a second, could not find him any-
where ;
But the third I journeyed landward, weeping, laden with
despair.
Tell me thou who knowest all things ; grudge not now thy
wizard lore ;
Did his weary feet rejoicing feel at length some friendly
shore ?
Doth he live—my child ? Or did the whirlpool down
beneath the waves
Snatch him in his golden armour to Poseidon's festal caves ?
Or if the billows in their arms have borne his body to the
land,
Tossed it up upon the rocks, or gently laid it on the sand,
In what pool or yellow shallow, where the hungry fishes
keep—
Stranded on what rugged reef now lies he couched for
endless sleep ?
For I fain would take him up and kiss once more that
woeful head
Ere with many tears I lay him down within some delved
bed,
So his wandering soul may pass to bliss among the tranquil
dead.

ARCHILOCHUS

ARCHILOCHUS, SERVING AS A HIRELING SPEARMAN, MUSES
AND REMEMBERS NEOBOULE, THE DAUGHTER OF
LYCAMBES OF PAROS

WHEN down beneath the waves the great sun goes,
And leaves me leaning on my spear, a-cold,
Watching from some beleaguered rampart old
The scattered fires where sleep a thousand foes ;
While one by one the staid rapt stars come in,
Till all the silver folk together met,
And on their thrones in ancient order set,
Wait ready for their revel to begin ;
Oh, then I cast an envious eye above,
And those bright sessions palely contemplate,
Gazing on Cassiopeia in her state—
Andromeda for whom knight Perseus strove :
But when I look on Ariadne's crown,
Whom Theseus left forlorn on Dia's isle
To mingle with the waves her moan awhile
Till flushed Iacchus from his car leapt down,
Then, then, grown dim with sudden tears, my sight

Explores those brave celestial halls no more ;
 My thoughts fly back to Paros' rock-bound shore,
 Where dwells my Love with sorrow day and night.
 Now forth I step a God's heroic child
 Schooled up to valiance in wise Cheiron's cave,
 And swear in her dear cause e'en Death to brave :
 Now from the sky caught down by passion wild
 I dazzle her in Phoebus' golden mail ;
 Or very Jove in azure mantle fold
 All her white frailty round, then bid behold
 If now the jealous stars become not pale.

ARCHILOCHUS ON A LEMNIAN TRIREME

LONG from the stern I watched the lines of light
 That under certain nether stars lay traced,
 And toward our ship converged from every side
 Of the sea's vast calm circle : Night, it seemed,
 With silver chains had bound us where we lay.
 Rude clamour from the lower deck proclaimed
 Our dastard generals—how they revelled yet
 To drown day's shame ; while ever and again
 A song too tuneful for male soldier throats
 Broke through harsh laughter's tipsy rise and fall,
 Escaping on the night like some scared bird
 That leaves its high nest in a cavern's roof
 When wearied robbers enter in.

A star

Slid down the sky.

A lordly rioter

Climbed stumbling up the steps ; and as he reeled
Across the poop, his pampered hair left night
Fragrant with perfume, and his maniac words
Came whirling wild : "Tethys, my bride, I come !
In thy wet arms enfold me. Ah ! I burn !
Fierce through thy lover's veins flows fire enough
To warm thy cold heart, though its chilly blood
Stream universal as the infinite sea.
Oh quench my hot limbs in thy kind embrace—
One long, cool nuptial kiss !"—Then down he leapt.
At his mad drunken mouth the sea rushed in.
Small ripples washed the hull, then sank to rest.

THE SADNESS OF NEOBOULE, WHEN THE SPRING RE-
TURNING DOES NOT BRING ARCHILOCHUS WITH IT

THROUGH the garden it wandered stealthily :
In at my window it came,
And I knew that Spring was its name,
Spring that comes a wind from the West,
The wind which all things love the best,
Laden with gifts for all so wealthily.
Their leaves it gives to the trees,
To the meadows flowers,
To the flowers it sends the bees,
Raiseth the glow-worm lily bowers ;
And on heart of beast and bird it sheddeth love in showers.
In at the window it came,
And I knew that Spring was its name.

Then I thought : " It is well ;
He will soon be here ;
His sword will he sell,
He will barter his spear,
And leave the great fenced town at the dawn of the year.
He will tarry no more ;
His ship will be fleet ;
I shall hear the quick beat
Of his foot on the floor ;
I shall tremble with joy to behold his face in the door.
He shall breathe in my ear
As he kisses my brow,
' My love, I am here ;
I have kept my vow :
The flower of our joy may unfold ; our winter is over now.' "

But the days flew by, and he came not ; the flowers from
the meadows were peeping.

I sat by my mother and span : my task was wet with
weeping.

Down from my hands my spindle dropped ;

Close to her feet its rolling stopped.

" Why are thy hands so faint and weak ?

What secret trouble hath paled thy cheek ?

Hath thy heart's sweet innocence been waylaid

By Love that hath lurked, like a snake in the shade,

Ambushed close with waiting wings

Under the flowers of thy maiden Springs ? "

The days flew by, and he came not ; the Summer was there
in his glory.

Out to the woods I went ; to their trees I told my story.

I asked them wherefore my Love delayed,
By what cruel blast could his sail be stayed :
As it played with their darling leaves had the wind
Left at parting a rumour behind ?
But I doubt if my question could reach or impress
The trance of their somnolent consciousness ;
For their drowsy boughs did nought but sigh
As they stirred in the weak wind fitfully,
And their moss-grown multitudes I deem
Were lapped in the bliss of summer dream.

Then I asked the lizard why,
And the lizard made reply :
" Go ask of the bee ;
He is vagrant and free—
A wandering merchant and traveller he.
We lizards have business in hand ;
A sweet theft have I planned :
While the bee is abroad
Adding wealth to his hoard,
We must enter his home
By its narrow, low door,
And rifle his comb
From the roof to the floor.

Then I ran to find the bee,
Searched through all his blue-bell lea,
Found him swinging in a cup,
Drinking all its sweetness up.
Without turning from his task,
" Child," he answered, " wait and ask
These idle flowers when I am gone :

They will tell thee all anon.
I am busy, they have leisure.
What have all their tribes to do
But stand and guard their yellow treasure
In their cups of red and blue,
Till I hurry buzzing back
To take what else my bags may lack?
They will tell thee all with pleasure."

So I stooped to ask the flowers,
That spend their happy hours
Lending tiny blossom ears
To the wandering gossip breeze,
That tells of all it does and hears
On lands and seas.
I asked them could they tell me,
Could their scented petals spell me
Some blown rumour from the ocean,
Some faint-recollected notion
Of what the winds might say;
But they said: "Nay!—
We know what thou wouldst know;
But his fate we may not show."
Then I wept bright tears upon them
And fancied I had won them
All their secrets to unfold;
And many things they told,
Deeds done beneath the trees,
Bright loves of birds and bees—
But of him no word.
So I turned in grief away,
And left their prattle gay;

But still they murmured on,
Though their questioner was gone :
To their merriment no truce,
For their babbling tongues were loose,
And by wakened memories
Of sweet woodland histories
Their fragrant hearts were stirred.

ORPHEUS

It was a vale girt in by magic hills,
Watched round about by giant cedar-trees ;
A land made musical by shallow rills,
Birds in the boughs, and underneath the bees.
How I came there I know not, such dark ills
Had whelmed my soul with grievous memories ;
But when I came to that enchanted spot
I know that all my sorrow was forgot.

I strayed at will along the winding ways,
And watched the many various forest things
That in those green glooms passed their cloistered days,
Insects that plied on freaked and mottled wings
Between the flowers, deer on the lawns agaze
Or necks astrain toward luscious clusterings ;
All day I watched them from the shadowy bowers
Beneath whose leaves I hid my happy hours.

And seeing that so long my heart had known
No thought of living creature, beast or man,
Save of one vanished phantom shape alone,
My lost Eurydice, what wonder then

If, when oblivion o'er my pain was thrown,
A luxury of pensive pleasure ran
Through all my senses—pleasure with still stealth
To watch and love that sylvan commonwealth.

But when at length the evening made more dim
The twilight 'neath those boughs for ever pent,
I rose and, careless, took a wayward whim
To set my feet against a steep ascent
That soon had lifted me above the brim
Of that wide leafy sea. Panting I leant
Upon a rock that crowned that forest isle
To watch reluctant day's last sumptuous smile.

The daisied turf spread out its carpet green
Around grey scattered stones. No tree was there
Save one old almond: like an aged queen
Who gems her locks and loads with jewels rare
Each withered hand, e'en so this tree was seen
To lift aloft into the purple air
Its ancient branches with their new-born dress
Of blossoms crowding white and numberless.

I wondered much what thought's caprice had planned
To set within this wild secluded spot
This mother of sweet flowers—what perished hand
Had planted here to flourish, fall, and rot
These fragrant generations all unscanned
By lovers' eyes, forsaken and forgot
Save by the vagrant forest bee alone,
Who ravished their stored sweetness, and was gone.

And, as I mused, I saw out of the West,
Coming to meet me 'neath that flowery tree,
Her sweet authentic image, dimly dressed
In the same robes wherein she last did flee
Back to the houses of eternal rest—
The twice-lost spirit of Eurydice.
Around her fell the blooms as she did go,
Starring her mantle and her hair like snow.

Weeping I spake : " Ah, wherefore hast thou come
To move the memories of forgotten grief ?
Even now, while 'mid the trees I made my home,
I had become like a glad careless leaf
That soon must drop and find its mouldy tomb.
Wast thou so jealous of one hour's relief ?
Or was no comfort there where thou hast been—
No joy, dear soul, among those meadows green ?

" Else wherefore from thy peace beneath the sun
Hast thou returned to visit my despair ?
Too long I tarry here : my hour is run."
Thus to my moan she answered : " Nought dwells there
Save holy, tranquil bliss. But I have won
Respite from lonely joy, brief leave to share
One piteous hour's fond parley. Then give heed,
And from my speech take solace for thy need.

" Oft in thy songs hath Love's sad tale been told,
How even as with the beasts in field and den,
Insects upon the leaf or in the mould,
So is it ever with this world of men—

Born in the Spring, in Summer 'tis grown cold ;
The leaves fall, and it faints and fades, and then
Comes wintry Death and takes tired Love away,
And covers it for ever in the clay.

“Such are those transient Loves that time may mar,
Desire's sweet children of imperfect worth.
But our great Love was not as others are :
With bright increase of splendour from its birth
It lightened all our darkness, like a star,
Filling with joy this sullen-seeming earth :
Nor when I from sweet life and thee was rent
Might its proud beams endure diminishment.

“Through Hell's dark halls their path of fire they made,
And mocked the cruel eyes of wondering Death :
By their strong radiance vanquished and dismayed,
To my spent limbs he yielded back my breath :
And though my soul, by that fond look betrayed,
Once more 'mid stranger shadows languisheth,
Our Love's peculiar planet hath not set,
But o'er thee hangs its mystic influence yet.

“Powers are there of such sovereign purity
No chance can make their perfect glory less :
Such is the changeful moon, the restless sea,
The summer meadows in their shifting dress ;
Such was our Love ; such suffer it to be.
These change but alter not their loveliness :
In them hath Beauty built her sacred shrine,
And fills each phase with native grace divine.

“Therefore with vain unseasonable moan
Wrong not the spirit of our beatitude ;
But, in these woods abiding here alone,
Sing to the heart of this green solitude
Our happy tranquil story—here where none
May violate thy rapture’s pensive mood.
In our joy’s secret season who had part ?
Or was it purchased in the world’s loud mart ?

“Ah, many songs thou madest for the sake
Of that loud world. Then let this last be mine.
What matter though the senseless air must take
Its wasted beauty ? Do these brooks repine
Because their gentle melodies awake
No joy in any human heart but thine,
Though still from year to year, in murmuring play
With weed and stone, they sing upon their way ?

“Or shall this flowery tree with less delight,
Or these pale spears of modest asphodel
With weaker pride put forth on Spring’s young light
Their opening blooms, when thou no more shalt dwell
Within their wastes, their loving eremite ?
For then thou shalt be with me—Ah, farewell ! ”
So ’mid these stones I sit and sing, and wait,
Even as she bade, the coming of my fate.

THE PLAYMATES

BEND close, stoop nearer my sisters ; I deem my death is
upon me ;

Scarce e'en so can my voice enter the doors of your ear—
My voice that of old could leap so far from under the pine-
tree,

To run through the Delphian dells and woods in a melody
clear.

Oh ! the old pine with its song for us three singing beneath it !

What will the old pine care whether for three or for two ?

Neither shall ye two care overmuch, but sitting together

Tell the old legends again, sing the old melodies through.

Then shall ye rise, take hands and dance, while faint from
the valley

Reaches the shepherd's song borne with the bleat of his
sheep,

Till when weariness comes ye sink and rest on the verdure,

Gazing with pensive eyes o'er the Corinthian deep.

Ah ! would God I could stay, my soul in this beautiful body,

Loving ye twain and beloved, linger awhile and be gay !

Yet were I well content if now when the terrible Hermes

Draws through my mouth with his wand my spirit and
takes it away,

If he should pause in the midst of the grim Plutonian
pathway,

Turn at the pleading prayer of the tremulous ghost at
his side,

Back to the earth, and choose some delicate thing of the
pine-boughs,

Squirrel or sweet-voiced bird, taking its limbs as it died,
Or, better than all, the cicala, that there in that peaceable
hostel,

Breaking its journey dark, my spirit awhile should abide.
So would I sit in the boughs, and with dwarf eyes watch
you beneath me,

Through small insect ear drinking delight from your voice.
But if your joy fell hushed at the thought of the silent sister,

How would the branches above chime with a musical noise,
Till one should say to the other, "Dost hear how blithe
the cicala?"

Ne'er have we heard her discourse music so rich and divine;
Surely the gods have had pity, in lieu of her that was taken,
Setting to cheer our hearts a spirit of joy in the pine."

JUNO'S PEACOCK

ONCE Juno's peacock sued to win the love
Of Cytherea's youngest, whitest dove,
The trustiest and most docile to the rein
Of all the team that drew her airy wain.
Well might she be the favourite of her Queen :
Her soul was like her body, white and clean ;
A nun to Venus' service dedicate,
She had no thought of any feathered mate.
Yet that proud courtier bird, her flaunting wooer,
With foolish gallantries would still pursue her,
Strutted and minced before her wondering eyes,
And put to proof his daintiest fopperies.
Venus would smile to see this gorgeous sir
Behind her progress meekly squiring her.
Oft poor suspicious Juno, when her lord
Played the sly truant from their festal board,
Wanting her diligent spy, would storm and rave
Because this silly lackey, this fond slave,
Came not at call to learn her jealous hest,
Wandered away himself on amorous quest.
But all his foolish courtship proved in vain :
She had no thought to spend upon his pain.

JUNO'S PEACOCK

Her pious mind was fixed on duties high.
His proud-poised neck of lapis lazuli,
His noble tail she deigned not to behold,
Nor those brave flanks rich robed in burnished gold.
So sick with fretful hope away he flew
To a smooth lonely tank where he might view
Inverted an old city's ruined gate
'Mid rose-wreathed cypresses, and contemplate
All his scorned charms, each sad neglected grace
Mirrored beneath him in the well's calm face.
Here perched upon the brink this bird of folly
Sighed out a tempest of vain melancholy,
Wrinkled and marred with tears of peevish woe
His pool-reflected image seen below ;
Then moralised on this inconstant theme,
Saying, " Alas ! fair picture, that dost seem,
By teardrops into trembling agues thrown,
In more than faithful portraiture alone—
Nay, with prophetic force to illustrate
Thy bright original's malignant fate,
Showing how swift defacement and misfeature
At woe's mere touch wait on each mortal creature.
Delivered up a spoil to quick decay,
This pomp of plumage, this superb array,
This splendid livery so brave and rare
Shall strew the earth, plucked out by harsh Despair.
Yet ne'er disgrace so hideous will I brook :
Nay, while my charms yet wear their summer look,
From their true-pictured image writ beneath
I'll drink the solace of a noble death.
For beauty scorned save this what remedy—
Kissing itself, e'en with the kiss to die ? ”

Thus our poor love-sick wretch bade sad farewell
To his wronged beauty, then with purpose fell
Stooped down his head toward the glassy tomb
To dip his soul within the lake of gloom,
When in the tranquil mirror lo he sees,
Gliding between the spiring cypresses,
Jove's puissant eagle, his dear gallant friend,
Floating toward some tedious journey's end.
His lazy wings scarce moved, he went so slow :
The vesper sun lit up with tawny glow
Of mellow gold their curve majestic,
His noble breast, that antique ruin's wall,
Those sombre trees, that scene of gloom fantastical.
The peacock now, though still on death intent,
Delayed the tragic act so sternly meant,
And tempted to one sweet, last moment's pause,
Cried, "Noble comrade, hither, and for cause !"
Obedient to his call that mailed bird
Lighted upon an ivied tower and heard
The sad tale through with patient courtesy,
Then turned his head, fixed on the sun his eye,
And sagely thus took up his calm soliloquy :
"Oh simpleness of lovers, aye to choose
Death before life, and their true cure refuse !
Why must they still reject the reasoned lore
Of prudent love ? How oft must I deplore
The needless climax of a broken heart
For lack of some small aid from wholesome art ?
Many the cunning ways, yet plain and apt
To get by rote, whereby coy hearts are trapped,
By which reluctant beauty may be wooed
To quit its proudest, most unwilling mood.

Myself, trained up in Jove's own master school
In the nice practice of each stablished rule,
Tried and approved a perfect graduate,
Each precept can rehearse and illustrate
Theory with due example,—borrowed whence,
Save from great Jove's august experience ?
Therefore, good friend, take comfort and rejoice :
Among my precepts pick thy wary choice.
First the swan's way woo thou : with swan-like grace
Die many a time before her cruel face ;
And with each death sing sweetly, sing how Love
Subdued of old the imperial heart of Jove,
Until his fond Omnipotence put on
The feathered ambush of a snow-white swan.
Haply she'll wonder with a sweet surmise
If Jove himself, lurking in fresh disguise,
Worships his hundredth bride with all those painted eyes.
Or thou mayst call to aid a tested power,
And whelm her frailty in a golden shower.
Whene'er in Venus' team she fares abroad,
Of burnished feathers spoil thy downy hoard—
Be thine too precious, from an aureole's breast
Borrow bright plumes and softly line her nest.
So was fair Danae won ; so oft have I
Myself prevailed o'er coy perversity.
But if, more masterful, thy generous passion,
Scorning base means, would sue in nobler fashion,
Rise to the mountain-top, thou valiant lover,
And from that prospect gazing down discover,
Creeping upon the earth some dangerous snake,
Some wolf's or panther's whelp : for her dear sake
Swoop down to battle from thy dizzy peak,

Bear off thy lifeless foe with claw and beak,
And, breathing love and protestation sweet,
Lay down thy prize before her coral feet,
Though now their hue can scarce contend with thine,
Which glorious victory doth incarnadine.
'Twas in this gallant, military way,
Bragging false triumph at pretended fray,
Jove won Alcmena ; in this martial wise,
Well suiting my courageous qualities,
Myself I mostly use Love's flowers to cull.
Yet many styles there be, named from the bull,
From cloud, from fire—" Enough," the peacock cried,
"How may I thank thee friend? Now had I died,
Casting away my silly breath for nought,
But for thy counsel. Fain would I be taught
This brave, heroic style. Let cowards use
Disguise and gold : the soldier's way I choose."
"Come then !" the eagle cried. Away they sped.
Their talons planted on a hill's bald head,
Now gazing down they see the dwindled kine
(Like ants that cross a path from mine to mine)
Slow moving toward their stalls in thin-drawn straggling
line ;
And ambushed in the brake two lions they spy,
That wait till the main herd hath sauntered by,
Intent to pull the hindmost laggard down ;
And far away toward a rock-built town
They see the farmer's child who brings a lamb
Up through the fields, led bleating from its dam
To be their simple, rustic sacrifice
To mighty Jove : they show like two small mice,
One brown, one white, on a green carpet set.

"Friend," quoth the eagle, "it is time to whet
Upon the rocks thy claws that must to-day
Snatch from these lions their proposed prey.
Or should thy soul disdain ignoble cattle,
Then brave these regal thieves to generous battle."
Confused, the peacock wondered which were best,
And thought perhaps he was too finely dressed ;
In fighting lions shields and swords are worn ;
Skirmishing, sadly might his train be torn.
"Surely," he answered, "it were hardly wise
To rob earth's monarchs of their lawful prize.
Let us respect their rights, and rather choose
To balk the kings of heaven of their dues.
They are our lords : we servants have our rights,
Our liberties, and lawful perquisites.
That little lamb that to the altar wends
Across the fields will better serve my ends,
And be the daintier gift ; will seem moreover,
On pretty cowslip fed and tender clover,
Of sweeter worth than blood-gorged monster fell.
Nay, it will prove a freight more portable."
Now forth they launched, and soon with upward stare
Amazed the child beheld the mighty pair
With broad majestic curves down-sweeping through the air.
First came Jove's orderly with graceful flight ;
While far above his gaudy acolyte
Mimicked his style and motions. Frayed she fled,
Leaving her charge unleashed ; and overhead
The eagle brought his wings to hovering pause,
Till his slow friend arrived might thrust his claws
Within his victim's fleece. When that was done
With much ado, the lamb began to run ;

Dismayed to feel itself so strangely backed,
Away it frisked. However next to act
This peacock could not tell, borne fast away
Like a tall general hasting from the fray
On milk-white steed,—nobly his purple vest
Floats out, and nobly nods his triple crest
As he flies leaving on the corpse-strewn field,
Cast in a myrtle-bush, his blameless shield.
Some Thracian plucks it forth. Why should he fret?
One every whit as good his gold can get.
So on the lamb this sumptuous cavalier
Was hurried to and fro in mad career,
Helpless and scared, too ignorant and weak
To lift in air or slay it with his beak.
“Help, comrade, help!” he screeched, “haste and despatch
This restive beast, against whose woolly thatch
My untrained beak is proved a very toy,
Weak as a wren’s.” “Friend, though I wish thee joy
In thine affairs,” the eagle made reply,
“Yet by Apollo’s all-beholding eye
Sworn am I ne’er to worry, maim, or kill—
Ne’er one small drop of blood to shed or spill
(Nay, not so much as some slight gnat or flea
Might drink) of aught in air, on land or sea
To great or lesser godhead dedicate.
Yet nought forbids me that I lift this freight,
And to thy mistress’ door thy lamb and thee translate.”
Now without further parley he descends
And plants his feet behind his frightened friend’s,
Who cannot now pluck forth from fleecy trap
His tangled claws howe’er he tug and flap,
But buckled to his gift through air must ride

Posting it willy-nilly to his bride.
It chanced that Venus drove abroad that night
Beneath her ranging sister's thrifty light
On secret visit to each marble shrine,
Cydonian, Gnidian, and Erycine ;
So gliding home beneath the peeping dawn,
Wondering she saw upon the daisied lawn,
That, bushed with rose and myrtle, round about
Her Paphian shrine spread its green carpet out,
A tender lamb that wandered here and there
Cropping the sacred flowers, nor seemed to care
For that gay squire who, dozing on its back
After his crazy vigil, swept the track
Of its slow pasture, dragging in the trail
The dew-drenched glories of his opulent tail.
Smiling the queen drew rein, and thus addressed
The leader of her team : " Oh trebly blest,
My gentle dove, in this thy suitor brave !
Who, not content thy costly love to crave
With trivial common gifts, by force or sleight
Must rob the farms of men for thy delight,
And perched upon his gift watch out the long chill night."
Hereat the drowsing peacock raised his head
And gazed around abashed, discomfited :
Crestfallen quite, he fain would fly away,
But knows he cannot, struggle as he may :
Therefore, resolved to wear a gallant face,
Even in the very meshes of disgrace,
Erects his poor wet tail's bedraggled plumes,
And that proud style and dignity assumes
Wherewith he holds in awe his cringing fellow-grooms.
" Sweet lady ! " he began, " kind mistress mine !

Well doth the gracious Queen of Love divine
The purpose of my gallant industry,
And wherefore 'neath the shrewd nocturnal sky
I kept cold vigil. It was love's decree,
Yea, Lady, 'twas my headlong love of thee
That sent me to the peopled haunts of man
(Scorning the dulcet fashion of the swan,
Or mean seductive gold), to snatch away
This lusty lamb which at thy feet I lay,
Proof of my prowess and Love's scorching dart
That makes a cinder of my amorous heart.
Behold, 'tis thine, whether to slay outright,
Or spare to be thy fleecy favourite.
But if, being found too cumbersome, my gift
Be doomed to death, then will I make some shift
Before thy very eyes to spill its life,
Or call some priest with sacrificial knife
In proper formal wise—nay, that were best :
For, Lady, sure it were a sorry jest
That in thy sight my gaudy plumes should reek
With brutal slaughter, and that I should speak
My tender passion's plaint through grim sanguineous
beak."

"Soft you awhile, fair Sir !" broke in the dove.

"I entertain no question of your love :

It needed not that you should so forsake

Your courtly ways, your carpet style, and take

Fierce lessons in some brigand vulture's school,

To prove you were a coxcomb and a fool.

That long ago we knew. How couldst thou deem

So strange a gift of price in my esteem ?

Out of my sight convey thyself and it,

Lest Juno miss her henchman ; for 'tis fit
Great queens should go well lackeyed. Hence ! and take
This counsel with thee which my mother spake :
The fort, she said, of maiden modesty
Is like an island town that, built on high,
Looks ever down upon the busy ships
Coming and going through her harbour's lips.
Let but a fleet come steering from afar
On stranger sails equipped for boisterous war,
A massive chain is drawn across the port,
The towers are manned ; for foes now care they nought,
Howe'er the scolding trumpets threat and snarl
Demanding entrance with rude saucy parle.
But if the vessel of their sovereign prince
Approach from distant voyage, he will convince
(Unfurling but his flag's bright heraldry)
The jealous burghers that their lord is nigh.
Down to the quays the merry people throng ;
Toward the banquet-hall with dance and song
Beneath the pealing bells they lead their king along.
'Tis thus alone true gentleness is won,
By the heart's destined sovereign, or by none.
Lay in thy silly wits this lesson, and begone."
Alas ! poor wretch, befooled, disconsolate !
What now can he devise to vindicate
Affronted dignity and injured pride ?
He cannot jet and strut, his feet are tied.
Escape he cannot from his desperate plight
Rising majestic in offended flight.
There must he stay derided and bemocked.
He cannot curse ; his mouth with shame is locked.
But Venus from her chariot with a smile

Stepped down toward the weeping wretch, and while
Her twinkling fingers wrestled with the fleece,
"Enough," she said, "now get thee gone in peace.
Jest ne'er was fraught with quainter merriment :
So take our thanks for sport most excellent.
On, Doves ! 'tis late.—Yet we accept this lamb,
For e'en of bootless fool's-love Queen I am."

FOR A FAN

I

PROUD mayst thou be, gay lady of this fan,
Waving with dainty fingers to and fro
The pictured silk where those great regents glow.
See how each gallant, blithe Olympian
Presses in wonder rising from the feast
Around the horned and bearded infant Pan.
Hermes has dropped the hare-skin wrap, and lo !
Holds him aloft on one hand poised, to show
His wondrous child, strange blend of god and beast.
But most young roguish Bacchus takes delight
To see a squire so droll, and—oh the shame !—
Snatches from Ganymede a brim-full bowl,
To drench that baby throat with liquid flame.
Soon will the pretty snub-nose dance and roll
Upon his goatish legs, then in sad plight,
Across Jove's table from his father's hand
Totter and topple, laugh, and try to stand.

II

Behold, all ye who trifle with this fan,
The piteous plight of poor Omnipotence.
Alas for Io's hapless innocence—
Sweet Io, whom the fond Olympian,
Disguising godhead in false mask of man,
Has wooed to ruin ! Alas for those immense
Brave cloud-compelling hands, reduced to fence
His love with vapours thin as best they can !
"Shame on the God ! Poor half-hid thing !" ye cry.
Nay, for yon cruel queen reserve your blame,
Whose jealous eye distrusts that tell-tale mist :
For she brings home to Zeus his every shame,
And pities never a woman he has kissed,
Deeming it bliss enough next Pride to lie.

TROJAN CAPTIVES GRINDING CORN IN THE
 PALACE OF MENELAUS

I

GRIND, grind ! heavy quern !
 Why so stubborn ? Why so slow ?
 Though with all my strength I turn,
 Yet no faster wilt thou go.
 Soon will sink the holy Pleiads.
 One by one to sleep are gone
 All the six who ground beside me :
 I am left alone.
 For my task is still to finish ;
 Weak I am with toil
 Grinding meal for dainty Helen,
 Her for whom Troy bowed unto the soil—
 Weaker than a fainting lily
 In a festal basket borne,
 'Mid her flaunting garden-sisters
 Lying withered and forlorn.

Yet I too was once a dainty lady
 In the chamber of my princely husband :

Helen then was nought but Priam's daughter,
Ate the self-same bread as we, seemed only
Than us more fair.
Oh ! the marble palaces of Priam !
How beneath their roofs we took our pleasure,
Delicately dressed in gold and silver—
Said that we should go like queens for ever
In raiment rare.
At the quern I sit and ponder—
Send my thoughts abroad to wander :
Would they might for ever roam !
Foolish thoughts ! ah why, alack !
Must they needs come posting back
To their dreary home ?
Here they must be clothed in black.
Why, when they had learnt to flee
From this world of rueful things,
Could they not have kept their wings ?
Foolish thoughts, what could you lack ?
You were clad like queens and kings
There where you should be.

II

Why dost thou stoop thy head over thy grinding ?
Surely it is not heavy still
With somnolence or grieving ?
The morning yet is young, and at the quern
We have but toiled one hour.

And how canst thou be sad ? Have we not all been singing
Our songs in turn,
Because we know that singing scares away
Sad thoughts and haunting grief ?
Take up the song : 'tis thine. In song, they say,
Even the dungeoned Titans find relief.

Neither for sorrow nor for weariness
Over the mill I bow my head :
But I would listen to the plaintive song
Sung by the barley grains between the stones.
They say that once upon ten thousand stalks
Within a vale they grew, and they remember
How the oaks and willows round their field
Could show no leaves more fresh and green than theirs :
But they were happy then, and proud delight
They took to see each other turn to gold,
And feel themselves fast growing up so high
That soon they thought to overpeer the trees :
And so they told the trees
Nodding all their rustling heads together,
Whene'er the wind passed by :
And the trees answered nought, but sighed and laughed
With all their leaves, for they had seen before
The fate of many and many a yellow field :
Moreover, with their stature grew their pride
Until in dream they seemed about to thrust
Their bearded heads through the high roof of Night,
And wed their gold unto the silver stars :
Nevertheless one day the reapers came,
And boys behind, who stooping filled their arms
And to the binders gave the nodding sheaves ;

While with shrill song and chatter they outdid
The blithe cicala sitting music-mad
Within the leaves aloft.

And on the threshing-floor what pain was theirs,
When of their golden armour they were stripped,
They say that we know well.

Now they have come between the crushing stones,
Yet are not sad, for they have heard us sing
Fair Helen's fame, and each fond grain has hope
That it by chance may come

Between the lips of one so beautiful.

But wherefore do you weep? Had then my singing power
To touch the hidden springs of woe?

I have but sung the fate of yellow corn;

And yet you weep as though

Of our own piteous tale had been my song.

THE END

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